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**BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA, GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS AND
INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS**

**“Monitoring Respect for Human Rights Around the World:
A Review of the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2005”**

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INTRODUCTION

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am grateful for this opportunity to testify at today's hearings on the State Department's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2005*. I will be speaking on behalf of Freedom House's Center for Religious Freedom. While Freedom House analyzes a broad range of political rights and civil liberties, I have been asked by this Committee to specifically address the situation concerning religious freedom. My testimony will comment upon the reports on China, Cuba, Egypt, India, Iraq, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, and Vietnam.

First of all, I wish to express our deep appreciation for these important hearings, and for your dedication to providing the oversight to help ensure that human rights concerns remain a force in U.S. foreign policy. These hearings also powerfully communicate to governments throughout the world that the American people are not indifferent to acts of genocide, torture, unjust imprisonment and other human rights violations, wherever they may occur.

Religious freedom is pivotal to a free society. Freedom of thought, conscience and religion is the prerequisite for the exercise of all other basic human rights. In theory and practice, free expression, freedom of press and freedom of association depend on the prior guarantee of a free conscience. As this year's *Country Reports* amply demonstrates, where religious freedom is denied, so too are other basic human rights.

Religious freedom has two dimensions. It belongs to individuals and also to religious groups. In recent decades, the institutional dimension of religious freedom has proved critical in opening up social space and offering essential political protection for reformers in repressive societies as diverse as Poland, Chile, the Philippines and South Africa. Today, we see a new generation of dissidents claiming their individual rights – including courageous Iranian and Saudi reformers who are being imprisoned and silenced for crimes of “blasphemy” when they dissent from their governments’ policies.

The State Department *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2005* is an extensive and detailed compendium, numbering hundreds of pages in length. But its real weight derives from the fact that it is the official record on the status of worldwide human rights by the United States government. It will be read and relied upon for a range of reasons by various government offices, and also by those in the private sector, including the media, investors, businesses, civic society organizations, teachers, as well as ordinary individuals. It will also be read closely by foreign governments. This year's report reflects a monumental effort on the part of the Bureau on Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. They and all the American Foreign Service officers throughout the world who contributed to it deserve to be commended. We will make critical comments about the *Reports*, but this should not obscure the fact that this publication has become indispensable to the field of human rights.

CHINA

The State Department Report on China is extensive and covers many of the severe human rights abuses that the government systematically commits against various religious groups: Tibetan Buddhists, Uighur Muslims, house-church Christians, unregistered Roman Catholics and Falun Gong practitioners. The Chinese Government views religion as a threat to its power. Accordingly, it restricts religious activities to government-sanctioned organizations and registered places of worship. It seeks to stamp out those religious activities that are not government-sanctioned. Religious groups that defy the control of the government face severe consequences, including mass denunciation campaigns, surprise raids, heavy fines, imprisonment, and torture. Those who are registered and sanctioned by the government also experience surveillance, censorship and other restrictions.

The new regulation on religious affairs, which took effect on March 1, 2005, has proved to be a tool for further restriction and persecution against unregistered religious believers and institutions.

The persecution against Protestant house churches in China intensified in 2005. According to reliable reports from the China Aid Association, from February to December 2005, 1,317 cases of arrest of house church pastors, leaders and believers have been confirmed in over twenty provinces. Seventeen foreign missionaries, including eleven Americans, in some ten different provinces, were arrested in the past year. Most of those arrested were released after interrogation that lasted from 24 hours to several months. The China Aid Association documented reports of torture, including drugging, by taking the testimony of the victims themselves; such torture was reportedly carried out by both Chinese Public Security officers and State Security agents.

Some foreigner religious believers were ordered to leave the country after being held for several hours of interrogation. On August 2, 2005, two American theological students were treated brutally and handcuffed after they were arrested at a Bible training site in Zaoyang city, Hubei province. Both of them were denied their right to contact the U.S. Embassy as part of international consulate protection procedures guaranteed in U.S.-China bilateral treaties.

A campaign to prevent "foreign infiltration" continued during the year. On July 7, Protestant Pastor Cai Zhuohua, his wife, and two other relatives were convicted of operating an illegal business stemming from their large-scale publishing of Bibles and Christian literature without government approval. Cai and two family members were sentenced to three years, two years, and 18 months in prison, respectively, while a fourth defendant was released after the trial for time served, as noted in the State Department report.

According to secret documents obtained by the Christian Aid Association from the City of Datong, Shanxi Province, and the City of Shayang, Hubei Province, details were

provided of China's systematic program of discrimination against religious "cults." Prepared by the Offices of the Leadership Group to Prevent and Handle Cultic Activities of the Chinese Communist Party (610 Office), these documents were found in a brief report, dated January 23, 2005 (Datong City), and January 28, 2005 (Shayang City).

They define religious cults in terms so vague, they pave the way for further abuse of religious believers by the Government. The Office of Leadership Group's documents define a religious cult in three ways. First, God is a performer of "miracles"; second, such organizations are similar to clandestine organizations like gangs and mafia societies; third, cults propagate evil teachings which are anti-science, anti-civilization, and anti-society.

These documents outline training session instructions for grassroots cadres regarding "policies on preventing and handling cults which operate in the name of religion." Included in the anti-cult study materials are several quotes by socialist thinkers, like Frederick Engels who remarked that those "seeking spiritual comfort... are naturally slaves."

Once supported by the government, since October 1999, Falun Gong has been officially banned as a "heretical cult." These documents make specific reference to the Falun Gong, describing it as an example of a "cult" waiting to "unite with other hostile forces, such as the democratic movement and Taiwan independence movement." The Shayang county document indicates that the Chinese government has purposefully engaged in a targeted campaign against other unregistered religious groups in addition to Falun Gong. The document specifically instructs local news agencies to avoid publicity about crackdowns on groups other than Falun Gong.: "While anti-cult training and lectures are conducted, names of other evil cults, except 'Falun Gong,' shall not be publicized in any propaganda material, media, or websites by any news agencies," it states.

Though still being investigated and yet to be verified, a report has surfaced that is so grave it warrants mentioning here: According to a Chinese journalist who recently escaped to the United States, a concentration camp, Sujiatun, in the city of Shenyang, has been specially constructed to hold some 6,000 Falun Gong practitioners from northeast China. The camp is said to have a large staff of doctors, whose job there is to conduct experiments on the prisoners and kill them efficiently. It is said to include a crematorium to dispose of the evidence. The journalist, working with a network of informants, states that the Chinese government uses the prison to conduct a business in selling organs harvested from those who are killed inside. In light of Harry Wu's past reports on organ harvesting from executed prisoners in China, this story must be taken seriously and investigated.

The State Department report, while providing detailed coverage of human rights abuses within China, neglects to mention the abuses orchestrated by Beijing against believers outside China, including some that have taking place right here on American shores. A recent example was the beating and robbery of Peter Yuan Li at his home in Atlanta on February 8. Dr. Li, a Princeton graduate and an American citizen, is the Chief Technical

Officer of The Epoch Times newspaper and a Falun Gong practitioner. The four intruders took only information assets, including computers and paper files, and left valuables jewelry and other valuables untouched. This incident was reported by Forbes magazine, the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, and Reporters Without Borders, and is currently under investigation by the FBI.

Catholics loyal to the teaching of the Vatican are also persecuted. The Cardinal Kung Foundation estimates that there are approximately 45 underground bishops in China, all of whom were appointed by the Pope, who have either been arrested and are now in jail, or are under house arrest, under strict police surveillance, in hiding, on the run, or have simply disappeared.

Bishop Gao Kexian of Yantai, Shandong, was arrested in October 1999. His whereabouts were unknown until he died in jail in January 2005. The cause of death is unknown.

The Cardinal Kung Foundation has documented that eight bishops were last seen in government custody. They are: Bishops AN Shuxin of Baoding, Hebei, HAN Dingxiang of Yong Nian, Hebei, JIA Zhiguo of Zhengding, Hebei, LIN xili of Wenzhou, Zhejiang, SHI Enxiang of Yixian, Hebei, SU Zhimin of Baoding, Hebei, YAO Liang of Xiwanzi, Hebei, and ZHAO Zhendong of Xuanhua, Hebei. These bishops are all in their 70's or 80's. Three of them have disappeared. (AN, HAN, and SU). Out of these three, two (AN and SU) have been disappeared for over eight years and one (HAN) was disappeared only several months ago after being detained approximately five years. It is not known whether they are dead or alive. One (JIA) of these eight bishops has been arrested at least eight times since January 2004, most recently on November 8, 2005.

Another, Bishop, HAN Qian of Siping, Jilin, has had an arrest warrant issued against him for many years and is in hiding.

Priests, seminarians, nuns and laypersons face similar harassment. Becoming an ordained priest and carrying out evangelization without state permission is a crime punishable by three years of labor camp. The Cardinal Kung Foundation reports that there are approximately 25 of them in jail or in labor camps at this time. Many cases are not reported and fact-finding is extremely difficult because of government secrecy.

Religious persecution in China is long-standing and it continues to worsen at a time when China is making significant economic progress, after it has become a member of the World Trade Organization, and after being selected for the prestige of hosting the Olympic Games. China will never be fully accepted by the rest of the developed world until it respects its citizens' fundamental right to religious freedom.

CUBA

The section of the Cuba report that focuses on religious freedom is well-documented and touches upon all relevant issues pertaining to religious freedom violations and restrictions

in Cuba. Based on the experience and insights of Freedom House's Cuba Project, I wish to add a few comments:

The Catholic Church, which has pressed for greater political liberalization inside Cuba, may be seeking a thaw in relations under Pope Benedict. Fidel Castro met recently with the new Pope's envoy, Cardinal Renato Martino. This meeting was publicly portrayed as a normal diplomatic visit during the course of Martino's tour throughout the Caribbean and Central America. Human rights activists have observed, however, that the regime is striving for warmer relations with the Vatican, possibly to marginalize or quiet local Church proponents of greater freedom. Castro extended an invitation to the Pope to visit Cuba during the meeting with Martino. How the relationship develops between the new Pope and Castro bears watching in light of the activism of those within the Cuban Catholic Church and the challenges presented to Castro by Pope John Paul II during his visit to the island and in subsequent years.

The regime maintains tight controls over religious organizations. Its Office of Religious Affairs, which acts under the orders of the Communist Party and the State, continues to regulate the work of all religious institutions in Cuba, particularly in their social work and activity. The regime also flagrantly uses the issuance of building permits for new churches and houses of worship as a discriminatory tool to favor those evangelical denominations that are friendly to the regime, and to hinder the pastoral work of other Protestant and Catholic churches. A recent example of the arbitrary restrictions on religious activity occurred on March 10th when it was reported that eleven Protestant pastors from Havana were detained allegedly for "political reasons." There has been no further information given on these cases.

EGYPT

The Egypt report gives an overview of the problems faced by Coptic Christians in building or repairing churches, and correctly says that further detail and information is given in the State Department religious freedom report, but it remains weak on other problems faced by Copts.

It states there were "reports of forced conversions of Coptic women and girls to Islam by Muslim men" but that "reports of such cases are disputed." Reports of such cases are difficult to investigate, are usually disputed and some, no doubt, are false. However, there continue to be credible reports of kidnapping and forced conversion. On March 23, 2004, Coptic Pope Shenouda III publicly condemned the kidnapping and forced conversion of Christian girls, particularly highlighting their abduction from supermarkets. It is very unusual for the Pope to speak out publicly on this type of issue (he has previously been under house arrest for remarks critical of the government) so this may indicate that it is escalating.

The report sometimes also uses excessively mild language. For example, it says that there are "occasional reports that police harass Christians who had converted from Islam." "Harassment" is much too weak a word here to describe the fact that such converts have

been arrested, imprisoned, interrogated and tortured, and that in November 2003, one such convert died in police custody. Converts also fear attack and even murder by Muslim radicals. The weakness of this language is also shown in the treatment of two converts during the period covered by the report, incidents that the report does not mention.

For example, in early 2005, Gaseer Mohamed Mahmoud, who converted to Christianity from Islam in 2003, was tortured by police, including pulling out his toenails, and, on January 10, 2005, with the assistance of state security police, was forcibly confined to Cairo's El-Khanka mental hospital after his adoptive parents discovered his conversion. He was kept in solitary confinement, kept in a water-filled room, refused visits from Christians, beaten, whipped, and was told that he would be kept until he renounced his new faith. After international publicity he was released June 9, but stayed in hiding.

On April 6, 2005, Baha al-Aqqad, a recent convert to Christianity from Islam, was arrested on the grounds that he had 'defamed Islam' and held in Doqqi prison. After 45 days he was transferred to Tora prison in Cairo, typically a prison for political prisoners.

While addressing government censorship, the report fails to emphasize that greater pressure often falls on writers because of the activity of extremists. For example, on July 13, 2005, a well known Muslim Egyptian writer, Sayyid al-Qimni, received a message from extremists that unless he renounced his views he would be killed. On July 16, he announced that he was recanting his past work and would forgo future writing assignments. Because of his more liberal Islamic views and his criticism of Islamic theology, he has been called an 'apostate' (one who has forsaken Islam) by those of more conservative views. In his statement, he referred to the fate of a previous Egyptian writer in a similar situation, Farag Fouda, who was shot and killed in 1992, and believed that the same future would await him unless he renounced his beliefs.

The report correctly describes the major problems faced by the Baha'i community, problems that appear to be escalating since the government began automating its identification system. Baha'i institutions and community activities are banned, and a 1961 Presidential decree stripped Baha'is of legal recognition. Egypt recognizes only Islam, Christianity and Judaism as religions, and an individual's identity papers and other critical legal documents must carry one of these designations. Hence Baha'is are denied ID cards, birth certificates, and marriage licenses, and find it increasingly difficult to register their children in school, to open bank accounts, and to register businesses. Since one can be arrested for not carrying an ID card, many Baha'is are in effect placed under house arrest.

Finally, reports that we received from Egypt indicate that Copts have felt under increasing religious pressure. Since the State Department Report was compiled, this tension has exploded. On January 17, 2006, in the village of Edyssat near Luxor, after a rumor that Copts were about to repair their local church, a mob attacked local Christian homes and attacked and set fire to the church building. At least nine Copts were hospitalized and one died of his injuries. On February 20, 2006, in the village of Azba

Wasef, in Giza Province, south of Cairo, following allegations that a banquet hall that Christians were building was in fact a church, a mob attempted to set fire to the hall and the church, and did set fire to at least four Christian homes. Eleven people were injured and several dozen arrested.

INDIA

The Country report is quite comprehensive in covering the challenges facing India as it develops as a nation. A few of these are worth highlighting:

Though a democracy, in fact the world's largest democracy, India has a weak judiciary. It has not succeeded in ending widespread corruption in its justice system. As the report indicates, thousands of cases of trafficking in persons, physical violence against low caste people, women, and children, extrajudicial killings by police forces, and incidents of religious discrimination are ignored by bribed judges and corrupt cops.

India also faces an array of separatist groups with insurgent forces. From separatists in Nagaland and Assam to militant communists in Andhra Pradesh to the dispute in Jammu and Kashmir, India struggles against insurgent forces within its borders. The communist militias alone killed more civilians in 2005 than in any previous year.

In addition, India is facing increasing political instability from homegrown religious extremists, especially Hindu extremists as represented by the RSS and BJP. These organizations aim to turn India into a Hindu nationalist state and threaten the stability and democratic character of the nation as they pursue any means necessary, including communal violence, to accomplish their goal.

According to the Washington office of the Dahlit Freedom Network, these three main challenges of corruption, insurgent violence, and rising Hindu extremism combine to uniquely affect minority religions, especially Christians. Violence against Christians is on the rise. Reportedly, more Christians were attacked or killed in 2005 than in any previous year. Hindu extremists have placed a particular focus over the past few years on forcibly removing Christians from India. Using a rise in insurgent violence as a pretext, Hindu nationalist organizations in 2005 called for nationwide violence against Christians and for legislation limiting religious conversion. These calls have been heard and answered by local and regional militant organizations, such as the Bajrang Dal and VHP. The majority of the attacks occurred in BJP-controlled states, including Orissa, Gujarat, and Rajasthan. The corruption permeating India's judicial system ensured that the attackers were not prosecuted.

This pattern of violence seems to be worsening in 2006. More attacks against Christians were recorded in January 2006 than in January 2005. The calls for violence by Hindu extremists have become louder and shriller. For example, in January, tens of thousands of Hindu nationalists gathered at a state-sponsored event in Dangs, Gujarat, under the slogan "Kick out the Christians." Prominent Hindu leaders called for anti-conversion legislation and for violence against Christians. While federal military police prevented violence in

Dangs, the call echoed from there to Malkangiri, Orissa, where extremist attacks resulted in the hospitalization of a dozen Christians on January 24. In an incident in Maharashtra state, 50 members of Bajrang Dal on February 26 attacked three Christian pastors associated with a charity and “mercilessly beat them up with crow bars,” Compass Direct quoted the general secretary of the All India Christian Council as stating.

Hindu violence next surfaced in the northwest state of Rajasthan this month where Christians have been experiencing a recent wave of large-scale violence. Compass Direct reports, “Hindu extremists have attacked churches and individuals throughout the state in recent months with virtual impunity. An already tense situation exploded ...after Hindu extremists objected to a book on comparative religion for sale on the campus of Emmanuel Mission International, based in Kota, Rajasthan. Police arrested three EMI staff members and issued ‘cease and desist’ orders for several of EMI’s social institutions, including schools, a hospital and an orphanage.” As the Center for Religious Freedom first reported, last week Rajasthan police, in a disturbing new development, traveled across the nation to Bangalore in South India to raid the home of the head of the Global Council of Indian Christians who had been defending the EMI. The founder of EMI had been previously awarded India’s highest civilian honor for his forty years’ of charitable service to India’s needy.

The vulnerable minorities are waiting for the government of India to publicly denounce the anti-Christian stance of the Hindu extremists and take measures to protect them from this religious hatred. The United States should be raising concerns about the failure of India’s government to stop this Hindu extremist violence and lending support to help India improve its system of justice.

IRAQ

In Iraq, religious strife has been defined in recent months by the very visible escalation of violence between the Shiite and Sunni Arab populations. The bombing in February of the golden-domed Shiite shrine in Samarra and retaliatory attacks against a number of Sunni mosques captured headlines worldwide. Less noticed is the mounting persecution of the Christian, Sabeen Mandeian and Yizidi religious minorities, along with the Shabaks and Turkomen. Christians, constituting the overwhelming majority of these groups, are represented chiefly by Aramaic-speaking (the language of Jesus) ChaldoAssyrians and a smaller number of Armenians.

About a million of these minorities remain in Iraq, with their numbers rapidly dwindling. Reportedly hundreds of thousands of Christians have fled the country over the last two years since the first of now more than a dozen churches were bombed or attacked. Since then other Christian property has been destroyed or confiscated, and many Christian people have been targeted because of their faith for death, kidnapping for ransom, or both.

As the UNHCR recently found: “Acts of violence reported by Christians and/or which appear to target Christians include bombings and other attacks on churches ... the serious

or fatal attacks on shop owners and/or business persons involved in trading and selling alcohol, harassment, extortion, kidnapping, and even torture of persons perceived as not respecting Islam (e.g. women who appear in public without a hijab, persons accused of not respecting the teachings of the Koran and persons refusing to convert to Islam)...Others have been targeted for kidnapping against ransom based on the perception that Christians are generally more wealthy than others.” It states further: “While much of the hardship and harassment they report that they face is symptomatic of the situation of general insecurity faced by all Iraqis in present day Iraq, members of the Christian minority nevertheless appear to be particularly targeted.” (emphasis added).

Some neutral observers are estimating that as much as fifty per cent of the hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees being processed in Syria are Christians. We could very well be witnessing the extinction of the ancient Christian community in Iraq as their numbers threaten to shrink to statistical insignificance. Though many incidents against them and the other smaller religious minorities are recounted in the report, their overall devastating significance for these communities is neither noted nor commented upon.

An Iraqi Muslim acquaintance recently visited my office to encourage the Center to speak out about the plight of the Christian and the other smaller minorities. He told me they are perceived as “weak” because they do not have their own militias and are few in number, and thus “easy targets for brutalization by the extremists of all groups – Sunni Arab, Shiite and Kurdish.” In his view, the United States has “abandoned” them. By this he meant that the U.S. government should more effectively use its leverage with the Kurds and Shiites to better ensure the protection of the small minorities, and should ascertain that a fair share of U.S. aid goes to develop their areas so they can find a modicum of security within Iran.

Observers, myself included, have compared Iraq’s Christian community to a “canary in a coal mine.” That is, the terror visited upon the Iraqi Christians, because they are weak, will eventually become the pathologies and trends of the extremists directed against the society at large, and, possibly, against other vulnerable minorities in neighboring countries.

Christians, the original targets of kidnappings and assassinations carried out by thugs disguised as police, continue to be victimized by this form of violence. The first incidence reported of a person killed by militants disguised as uniformed police officers occurred in Basra on November 18, 2003, when Sargon Nano, a Christian, was dragged from his vehicle and shot. This method of uniformed thuggery was then spread to target members of the Mandaean religious community, and, today, it victimizes many Iraqi sectors.

Islamist extremists have begun violently enforcing sharia rules on Christians. Ninety five per cent of liquor stores, mostly owned by Christians, have now been destroyed or shut, as the State Department reports. Christian women are being forced to wear Islamic head coverings, some who do not suffer acid being thrown in their faces. A source at the Assyrian Star magazine, the publication of the Assyrian American National Federation,

provided some other examples: On March 15, 2005 in Basra, as noted in the State Department report, university students listening to music and not in hijab were attacked by members of the Mahdi militias while picnicking. The Mahdi militants objected to the music, the western attire, and the mixed male/female gathering. The report fails to note that there was one student killed in the attack -- a 20-year-old Assyrian girl, Zohra Ashor, who had her western-style clothes torn off before being clubbed to death. (In August when the local office of al-Hurra tried to report on the event, it was threatened. The office has since closed and the employees are in hiding.) Likewise, in Mosul, the only women killed in targeted violence this past year were members of the ChaldoAssyrian community. One of them, twenty-year old Anita Theodoros Harjo, a student in Nineveh Art Academy, disappeared last August 8 as she ran errands between an Internet Café and her home. Her beaten and bludgeoned body, still clad in her American jeans, was found dumped in 'Akkab cemetery.

If such treatment of the Christians continues its pattern of broadening, what could follow is the complete Talibanization of behavior of that part of Iraqi society that is within reach of the Mahdi militias.

Christians and the other smallest religious minorities continue to be vulnerable throughout Iraq, even in the Kurdish area, particularly the KDP-controlled parts, as the report points out. The Iraq Sustainable Democracy Project (ISDP) reports that Kurds linked to the KDP have confiscated millions of dollars of ChaldoAssyrian Christian property in such towns as Derey, Coumaney and Maristak. At the same time, the political disenfranchisement of many Christians that is acknowledged in the report regarding the January 2005 elections, as well as the October 2005 referendum (which is not so acknowledged), has exacerbated the Christians' disadvantage in claiming an equitable share of reconstruction funds. To give one example, in the town of Bakhdeda, home to 30,000 ChaldoAssyrian Christians, houses are collapsing and children are regularly exposed to septic water as they play, but the churches appear to be in mint condition -- reportedly the result of a cynical allocation of reconstruction funds by Kurdish officials there. KDP-controlled areas in northern Iraq could soon see parishes without parishioners. In other places, such as the city of Mosul, there are increasing demands posted to Christians, both particular and generic, to leave the city or risk death, reports the ISDP.

Violations of the human rights of these non-Muslim groups are often hidden within the report's descriptions of the larger situation of insecurity and terror. Greater focus needs to be given to the Christians and the smaller minorities for two essential policy reasons:

First, the proportional effect of even small numbers killed on the diminishing Christian population and the other non-Muslim minorities has enormous implications for the continuation of religious diversity in the country, an important moderating effect on that society, as well as for the survival of a unique and ancient Church.

Second, the tendency to concentrate on bigger groups and numbers masks the signs of new trends and methods in the violence – methods that are practiced first on the “weakest” sector, the Christians and other small religious minorities.

Finally, as the tragic drama plays out concerning the abduction of *Christian Science Monitor* journalist Jill Carroll, let us remember her translator, Allen Enwiya, a ChaldoAssyrian who was shot immediately when they were captured. He had taken the job to support his wife and small children after his music shop had been bombed. The invisibility of his persecution and death, even in such a high-profile case, is a familiar plight for Iraq’s smallest minorities.

The United States government should more closely monitor and report on these very vulnerable religious minorities who are being preyed upon by all sides; ensure their protection through effective diplomacy and through economic/reconstruction aid that they themselves can administer for their villages and areas, engage in a consultation process with their civic leaders to create for them safe havens within Iraq; and develop opportunities to allow the safe return of the hundreds of thousands who have fled the country and are now stranded in Syria and Jordan. In Iraq, the United States has the political and economic leverage that could possibly determine the fate of Iraq’s ChaldoAssyrian Christians and other small minorities.

NORTH KOREA

In December 2005, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom issued a comprehensive report on the conditions of freedom of religion and belief in North Korea, entitled “Thank You, Father Kim Il Sung.” This report was the first ever to systematically interview dozens of former North Koreans, as well as others who have first-hand knowledge of the situation. The report documents severe abuses of religious freedom, including executions, torture, and imprisonment, along with the forceful imposition on all North Koreans of the regime’s quasi-religious cult of personality, called *Juche* and/or Kim Il Sungism.

Specific detailed findings from the Commission’s report include the following:

- *Juche*, the official state ideology of Kim Il Sung Revolutionary Thought, is the only officially permitted system of thought or belief in North Korea, and is enforced through ongoing mandatory adult education classes in the workplace and in shrine-like Kim Il Sung study centers;
- intensive and continuous anti-religious propaganda is carried out by the government in the schools, media, and *Juche* study sessions;
- religious activity is banned, resulting in the fact that none of the interviewees was aware of any authorized religious activity inside North Korea;
- persons caught for engaging in religious activity are severely persecuted, which most interviewees had either heard about or personally witnessed; such persecution included execution, torture, and imprisonment of persons for personal possession of a Bible or other religious materials;

- brutal interrogation is carried out by North Korean police officials of repatriated North Koreans who are apparently sent in large numbers to incarceration facilities; contact with Korean-Chinese churches, and, more generally with South Koreans is considered a political offense, and several of the interviewees related tales of persecution as a result of their contact with churches in China; and
- following the suppression and virtual elimination of all public observance of religion by Kim Il Sung since the 1970s, the regime has allowed the re-emergence of a highly circumscribed, tightly monitored, and state-controlled religious practice that is best described as an emanation of the party-state itself.

The 2005 country report neither cited, nor incorporated, the findings from the Commission's seminal work "Thank you, Father Kim Il Sung." It could be that the Commission's study was published after the Country report was written.

Nowhere in the Country Report is there a discussion of the violently anti-religious propaganda the regime spreads through state schools, media, and adult ideological study sessions. Although there is some discussion of ideological indoctrination by the state scattered throughout the report, the Commission's study provides a detailed description of how every individual is subject to cradle-to-grave indoctrination of an ideology that all North Koreans understand to be the only belief system permitted by the regime.

Finally, although the report cites South Korean media reports from one defector that repatriated North Koreans who have had contact with churches in China are considered political criminals and are subject to harsh treatment, the Commission's study provides substantially more corroboration of the extent of this problem. Over two-thirds of the North Koreans interviewed for the Commission study had themselves been repatriated from China, and several either suffered or witnessed first-hand grave abuses by the North Korean security services.

It is regrettable that the new study conducted by the Commission, an independent government agency, that sheds rare light on a pivotal human rights issue in a country that has risen to the top of the U.S. foreign policy agenda but about which the United States knows little was not mentioned in the State Department's human rights report. Hopefully, this was a timing issue and not an oversight. Because North Korea has a totalitarian system, ideology and religious belief are at the heart of the human rights situation.

PAKISTAN

Recent months have been particularly difficult for Pakistan's vulnerable Christian community as violent mobs repeatedly took to the streets as part of the fracas over the Danish cartoon, often targeting Pakistani Christians as proxies for Denmark and the West.

For years, Pakistan's various religious minorities have borne the brunt of the country's draconian blasphemy laws. Christian Yousaf Masih, a 60-year-old illiterate janitor from northwestern Pakistan, was among those arrested for "blasphemy" this past year because

he allegedly burned a Koran. In November in the town of Sangala Hill, after word of his case got out, mobs destroyed three churches, a convent, a Christian school, over four hundred Christian homes and Bibles. In December, a militant mob rallied to demand Masih's public hanging and the eradication of the entire Christian community there. Fortunately, Masih was eventually acquitted and released from prison, though hundreds of Pakistanis of all faiths have been and some continue to be charged with blasphemy.

Blasphemy riots resurfaced in February in protest against the publication of political cartoons depicting Mohammad in Denmark. More churches were set ablaze in various cities, a famous Christian singer was forced by thugs to recite the Islamic creed, a Pentecostal pastor was abducted and reportedly tortured, and large violent marches, sometimes led by politicians and government officials, destroyed or damaged Christian hospitals, schools, businesses and other property in various Pakistani cities. The AFP reported on March 12 that during one recent rally in Multan, the district Bar Association, a lawyers' group, announced a reward of 10 million rupees for the death of a cartoonist.

The Christians' tenuous position prompted a historic meeting of high-level leaders from diverse churches and Christian organizations in Islamabad on February 28, 2006. Organized by the All Pakistan Minorities Alliance (APMA), participants included the bishops of the Catholic Church and the Church of Pakistan, as well as the leaders of evangelical and other churches in Pakistan, and Christian Members of the Parliamentary Assembly.

Evidence presented at the meeting indicated that in a number of situations the police assisted the protesters in carrying out violent attacks against Christian churches and institutions, while in many other incidents police guards disappeared when mobs attacked Christian sites. According to the participants, provocative speeches by the "ulemma" (Islamic leaders) further aggravated the situation and instigated their followers to take the law into their own hands. Some participants spoke of the overall lack of security and safety for Christian minorities in Pakistan.

The participant agreed to a new initiative for self-protection based on the unity and solidarity of all the Christian churches, institutions and organizations in the country, as well as of moderate Muslims. They emphasized the importance of strengthening the All Pakistan Minorities Alliance as a national center to document and protest acts of violence and intimidation against minorities, as well as to represent the religious minority position with government officials and Muslim leaders.

RUSSIA

The Russia report is one of the most extensive of the State Department Country Reports. Here I would like to simply comment on Russia's new law on non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which will effect the work of faith-based groups, among others.

In spite of widespread concern and opposition, President Putin signed the NGO law on January 10, 2006. The new law is part of an ongoing campaign to dismantle any

meaningful institutional checks on the Kremlin's power. It gives authorities the power to isolate NGOs and human rights defenders from their international support networks and force them to shut down if they do not meet registration requirements. These organizations will be required to register with the government, detail their activities and submit to screening by a new regulatory bureaucracy, which will decide whether the activities are permitted. Vague language in the law will enable the authorities to intimidate and control the NGO sector.

Under it, the government can deny registration to any domestic or foreign NGO if it finds that its “goals and objectives . . . create a threat to the sovereignty, political independence, territorial integrity, national unity, unique character, cultural heritage and national interests of the Russian Federation.” The law also allows expanded governmental monitoring of NGOs. The Russian government will be allowed to send representatives to any NGO event, including internal meetings. This provision will deny basic rights to privacy and freedom from arbitrary state interference for these private groups.

Although the NGO law does not go into effect until April, already there is increased pressure on NGOs in Russia, especially on those organizations that work on human rights and the North Caucasus. In January, just days after President Putin signed the law, a Russian court banned two foreign NGOs (a UK charity and a German humanitarian organization) that were helping Chechen refugees.

The State Department report provides details about the continued Russian government pressure on the Russian-Chechen Friendship Society. It should be noted that human rights defender Stanislav Dmitrievsky, head of the Russian-Chechen Friendship Society, was convicted on February 3, 2006, under a counter-extremism law of inciting hatred or enmity on the basis of ethnicity and religion because he published statements of Chechen separatist leaders in the newspaper *Pravozaschita*. It is also worth noting at this point that the report's casualty figures for Chechnya underestimate by as much as fifty percent commonly cited figures.

The country report understates the level of international and Russian domestic concern over the NGO law. When the NGO law was introduced in the Duma last November, Freedom House convened a meeting to discuss its implications for civil society in Russia. NGO representatives, including those from Freedom House, Amnesty International, Open Society Institute, Eurasia Foundation, International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, National Democratic Institute, International Republican Institute, Human Rights Watch, Human Rights First, IREX and Internews, signed a joint letter to the Chairman of the Russian Duma urging him to reject the draft law on the grounds that it violated “the fundamental, universal rights of freedom of expression and association” and would undermine the independence of NGOs with intrusive and excessive regulations. NGOs in Russia also voiced their concern.

Freedom House Director of Studies Christopher Walker gives the following assessment of the law:

“The NGO sector has a valuable role to play as a check on executive power, offering valuable feedback to the authorities, and contributing a diversity of ideas to the policy debate. The long list of Russia's deep structural problems - enhancing the efficiency of state management, debureaucratization, diversifying the economy, and reforming the military and security services - cannot be solved by decree. This is of particular importance with approaching elections slated to be held in 2007 and 2008. In fact, both of these elections should be the appropriate forum in which to have a vigorous discussion about how Russia can tackle corruption and other challenges facing society. Unfortunately, an intimidated and beleaguered NGO sector will not make the sort of contribution to this debate that would serve the public interest. This reality brings us back to the implications of the passage of the new NGO law. Unfortunately, the common denominator in the new restriction on NGOs - as well as all of the steps taken to curb the independence of the judiciary, parliament, governors and news media - is the reduction of accountability of key institutions to the Russian people.”

SAUDI ARABIA

Perhaps the weakest human rights report concerns one of the most important countries in the post-9/11 world – Saudi Arabia. It provides a detailed, point-by-point discussion of Saudi Arabia's human rights record, but misses the big picture of the kingdom's fanatically bigoted ideology, often called “Wahhabism” after its founder. It is this ideology of Wahhabism that explains much of Saudi Arabia's “poor” human rights record. A form of Islamist Salaafi extremism, Wahhabism is a major basis of governance inside Saudi Arabia, and defines the propaganda exported throughout the world by the Saudi government. The report contains frequent generic references to Saudi's application of sharia or Islamic law but makes no mention of the state's overarching Wahhabi or Salaafi ideology. This would be comparable to describing the Soviet Union as a “secular” government without mentioning communism.

Underlying the human rights incidents and practices described in the report is an ideology based on a brutally enforced hierarchy of group rights – Muslim and non-Muslim, men and women, dominant Muslim sect and minority sect, with individual rights and freedoms subordinated to the group. No analysis of Saudi Arabia's human rights record can be considered adequate without a clear understanding of the government's ideological basis. It is this Wahhabism or Salaafiism that serves to distinguish Saudi Arabia as the “epicenter” of Islamist extremism, to use the phrase of a high-level Treasury official, and results in the government's rejection -- in principle as well as practice -- of religious freedom, equality under the law, and individual human rights.

Last year, the Center for Religious Freedom published a study based on original research analyzing Saudi propaganda tracts collected in the United States. The various Saudi publications gathered state that it is a religious obligation for Muslims to hate Christians and Jews and warn against imitating, befriending, or helping such “infidels” in any way, or taking part in their festivities and celebrations. They instill contempt for America because the United States is ruled by legislated civil law rather than by totalitarian

Wahhabi-style Islamic law. Some of the publications collected for our study direct Muslims not to take American citizenship as long as the country is ruled by infidels and tell them, while here, to work for above all the creation of an Islamic state. The Saudi textbooks and documents our researchers collected preach a Nazi-like hatred for Jews, treat the forged Protocols of the Elders of Zion as historical fact, and avow that a Muslim's duty is to eliminate the state of Israel. Regarding women, the Saudi state publications instruct that they should be veiled, segregated from men and barred from certain employment and roles.

In these documents, other Muslims, especially those who advocate tolerance, are condemned as infidels. The opening fatwa in one Saudi embassy-distributed booklet responds to a question about a Muslim preacher in a European mosque who taught that it is not right to condemn Jews and Christians as infidels. The Saudi state cleric's reply rebukes the Muslim cleric: "*He who casts doubts about their infidelity leaves no doubt about his.*" Since, under Saudi law, "apostates" from Islam can be sentenced to death, this is an implied death threat against the tolerant Muslim imam, as well as an opening to vigilante violence. Sufi and Shiite Muslims are also viciously condemned. Other Saudi fatwas in the collection declare that Muslims who engage in genuine interfaith dialogue are also "*unbelievers.*" As for a Muslim who fails to uphold Wahhabi sexual mores, either through homosexual activity or heterosexual activity outside of marriage, the edicts distributed in America advise, "*it would be lawful for Muslims to spill his blood and to take his money.*" Regarding those who convert out of Islam, it is explicitly asserted, they "*should be killed.*"

It is this ideology, which remains the basis for Saudi rule today, that is put in practice within the kingdom through a combination of religious police, vigilantes, and other security officials, sharia courts, and a harsh penal system. Until Saudi Arabia's rulers reject this as its governing ideology, their promises of reform are not credible. In a few weeks, the Center for Religious Freedom, in conjunction with the Gulf Institute, will release a new study of current Saudi educational materials showing that the Saudi state's ideology of religious hatred is very much intact.

I also wish to point out another major flaw in this State Department report: its frequent use of exculpatory language. This has also been noted by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, on which I serve as vice chair. In its March 10 press release, the Commission maintained that "there is an inordinate emphasis on optimistic statements by Saudi leaders; statements that have yet to be followed by action," and "[i]n some cases, the report even appears to justify serious abuses perpetrated by the Saudi government." The Commission provides some examples:

"[I]n the report under the section on 'Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, Degrading Treatment or Punishment,' there is a discussion, citing press reports, of government lashing of persons convicted under *sharia* (Islamic law). In explaining the specifics, the report states, '...lashes were generally administered with a thin reed by a man who must hold a book under his arm to prevent him from lifting the arm too high. The strokes, delivered through a thin shirt, are not supposed to leave permanent damage, but to leave

painful welts that bleed and bruise.’ This gives the impression that this particular act of torture employed by the Saudi government is administered in a humane, and thus permissible, manner. Further, in the ‘Freedom of Religion’ section, there is an inordinate amount of attention to statements by Saudi officials that could be read as improvements, while conditions for religious freedom have, in fact, not improved on the ground. Also, in highlighting the activity of imams in mosques, the report states that ‘Although to a lesser extent than in the past, mosque preachers, whose salaries are paid by the government, frequently used strong anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic language in their sermons...there continued to be instances in which mosque speakers prayed for the death of Jews.’ The decrease of frequency of these kinds of statements should not be construed as a significant improvement, however, given that inciteful and inflammatory remarks by imams are still rampant.”

Another example is found in the first sentence of the section on “Women” that in a blanket fashion asserts, without any supporting analysis of the relevant laws, “Sharia [Islamic law] prohibits abuse and violence against all innocent persons, including women.”

The State Department human rights report on Saudi Arabia should include a human rights review of Saudi religion textbooks used in public schools, government clerics’ statements, and publications by the state’s Islamic Affairs Ministry, as well as other state publications, and discuss Saudi governing ideology in general. It should verify whether reforms have in fact been carried out rather than crediting promises made by government spokesmen. Saudi laws and practices should also be evaluated according to universal human rights standards, as the State Department does in reporting on other countries.

SRI LANKA

The government of Sri Lanka has for years faced intense pressure from militant Buddhists demanding an end to the growth of minority religions in this overwhelmingly Buddhist country. Well-organized militants have perpetrated over 200 attacks against religious minorities, largely Christian, over the past two years, yet the government of Sri Lanka routinely appeases Buddhist extremists by failing to prevent the violence or prosecute those responsible. The State Department report appropriately acknowledges government indifference in the face of widespread and violent religious oppression. According to an assessment of the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, the report is deficient in that it neglects to mention the government’s introduction of anti-conversion legislation; and it does not recognize the link between religious oppression and certain political killings.

In 2005, Sri Lanka was on the brink of adopting legislation that would have undermined freedom of speech, press, assembly, and religion. On June 27, the government submitted to the parliament a criminal anti-conversion bill authored by the current Prime Minister. The bill sought to reverse the perceived growth of non-Buddhist religions by creating a new crime of “attempted conversion” punishable by 5-7 years in prison. An international outcry, including sharp criticism from the UN Special Rapporteur on Religious Freedom,

helped prevent the bill from coming to a vote before the most recent elections. Yet, the heated and often violent debate continues and Sri Lanka may again move to criminalize conversion in the coming months.

The report notes that a prominent Christian member of parliament was murdered inside a Catholic cathedral while attending Christmas Mass and that the killers may have been government-linked paramilitaries. The report also mentions a November 18th grenade attack on a mosque that killed 4 worshippers during morning prayers by assailants who remain at large. Unfortunately, the report describes these incidents as purely political killings and inexplicably claims that they were “not religiously motivated.” The specific targeting of houses of worship during prayer time should be included as an attack on religion. Political considerations aside, these attacks had the effect of terrorizing people of particular faiths and should be strongly condemned in those terms.

SUDAN

As the State Department’s Country Report demonstrates, Sudan is a country of acute misery and repression: A rebellion in the western state of Darfur that is being countered by a government-supported genocide, a South recovering from a twenty-year civil war that finally ended last year after having taken the lives of two million people and displaced another five million of its inhabitants, along its Ugandan border, a roving army of marauding rebels led by the madman Joseph Kony and calling itself the “Lord’s Resistance Army”; and severe human rights abuses in the northern part of the country.

The report focuses much of its attention to the situation in Darfur and human rights issues in the north. Therefore, I wish to use my limited time to say a few words about the South and the Lords Resistance Army.

Inexplicably, the report fails to mention that religion played a large part in the war between the North and the South that was resolved with a peace agreement in January 2005. The southern rebellion was triggered when Khartoum forcibly imposed Islamic law on the Christian and animist South. This is important to remember because it explains why the peace accords create a separate government in the South and devised a difficult power- and revenue-sharing scheme to accommodate both sides. With two entirely different systems of law and governance, the two sides will depend on the careful implementation of these terms to maintain the peace.

The United States played a leading role in brokering the peace. It must stay engaged in overseeing the implementation of the terms of the peace agreement. It must not allow the oversight committee, on which it has a formal role, languish as it has until very recently. I spoke last month with Minister Rebecca Garang, the new Transportation Minister of South Sudan. She said that there is little transparency in oil revenues and thus the South doubts it is receiving its fair share of the revenues under the peace accords. Ensuring this transparency should be a top priority for this administration after all it has invested – and achieved – in ending the North-South war.

The United States should also lead the international community in expediting the resettlement of the 4.5 million internally displaced persons back to their homes in the Nubas and the South. In addition, thousands of Southerners enslaved and transported to the north reportedly have been identified by the government's CEAWC program but they remain stranded in the north. All of these persons, who have already experienced unfathomable suffering, are vulnerable to further abuse, disease and exploitation and should be assisted in their safe return home without delay. A delegation of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom recently visited a camp outside of Khartoum holding some 40,000 persons who had escaped the violence and government-made famine in the South in prior years; the team was told that, since there is no transportation available to these people and there are no resources to sustain them should they return, for the indefinite future they must remain dependent on charity in the region of the country that a few years ago sent militias to destroy their homes and villages. Peace came to South Sudan over a year ago, and it is time to find a way to bring these desperate people home.

The Lord's Resistance Army, as this report, as well as the report on Uganda, observes, kidnapped children in Uganda and brought them to South Sudan. In fact, since it was founded in the 1980s, the group has kidnapped an estimated 38,000 children to serve as fighters, porters and sex slaves. Some South Sudanese, as the report notes, were among its victims. In addition, it is responsible for an estimated death toll of 200,000 from fighting and disease and the displacement of 2 million Ugandans. These figures are identical to those given in updates for the Darfur genocide, yet the Lord's Resistance Army has received scant international attention. The government in Khartoum has been a long-time supporter of Kony and in the past has given his Army sanctuary within Sudan's borders, although, as the report states, Khartoum has recently allowed the Ugandan army to come across its borders in pursuit of the Lord's Resistance Army. The United States should lead in publicizing this abomination and work with all the governments in the region to end it. The fact that children (entire student bodies of some schools have been abducted in raids) are the main victims makes this a moral imperative.

VIETNAM

Religious persecution continues in Vietnam, despite the adoption of the final portion of new religious legislation a year ago this month that was touted by Hanoi as a protection for religious freedom. Rather than liberalizing the situation for religious believers and allowing them to function freely under democratic rights, these measures demonstrate clearly that Vietnam persists with its prior policy of maintaining administrative control of religion. The new regulations continue with an artificial and arbitrary definition of legalized religion that is, allowing only a few, usually compliant, religious organizations of the six major religions. Vietnam continues to perceive members of non-recognized religious bodies as "enemies of the State." In a "White Paper" on human rights issued by Vietnam in August 2005, religious critics were described as "persons who wrap themselves in the religious cloak to serve the interests of the outside forces." This has produced a situation rife with religious tension.

Abuses against Buddhists, Christians, Mennonites, Hoa Hao Buddhists and all non-State-sanctioned religious communities continue to be widely reported. In addition to arrest, beatings, and imprisonment, tactics of repression that have reported in 2005 include detainee isolation, repeated and prolonged police interrogations, harassment, and death threats. The Paris-based Buddhist human rights group Que Me reports that “Religious Security Police” (*cong an ton giao*) infiltrated non-recognized religious bodies, using slander and disinformation to create schisms and undermine them from within. Members of the banned Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) remain a major target of persecution. Que Me reports the following: Representative boards set up by the UBCV in 12 provinces of central and southern Vietnam to defend the fundamental rights of local people were declared “illegal” by the government. Members of these boards were systematically harassed and pressured to cease all contacts with the UBCV. In August, 18 members of the Binh Dinh provincial board were interrogated without food for three days and its chairman, Thich Tam Lien, was hospitalized as a result. In Khanh Hoa, UBCV nun Thich Nu Thong Man continues to suffer relentless pressure and intimidation. In March 2006, she was expelled from Dich Quang Pagoda after police forced almost one hundred local people to participate in a “denunciation session” against her. UBCV Patriarch Thich Huyen Quang, 87, and his Deputy, Thich Quang Do, 76, remain prisoners in their monasteries after almost 30 years in detention for their peaceful advocacy of religious freedom and human rights. Thich Quang Do was arrested three times in the past 12 months and physically manhandled by Security Police. On November 19, 2005, police apprehended him in an attempt to prevent him from presiding at a religious ceremony at the nearby Giac Hoa pagoda. On February 16, 2006, he was arrested and detained for six hours at the Ho Chi Minh City railway station as he sought to visit UBCV Patriarch Thich Huyen Quang in Binh Dinh. After forty UBCV monks staged a hunger strike to demand his release, Security Police forcibly returned Thich Quang Do to his monastery from which he is barred from leaving.

Ethnic Hmong and Montagnard Christians in the Northern and Central Highlands also continue to suffer intense abuse, including arrest, torture and beatings, by security forces and local authorities who pressure them to abandon their faith. This continues to occur despite legislation banning forced recantations. New directives on Christianity have been used as a pretext to arrest minority Christians, and, as the Center for Religious Freedom disclosed last year, secret government directives have specifically ordered the eradication of Protestantism in minority areas (e.g., Task Force 184 document in Dien Bien province, February 25, 2005). Since November 2005, scores of Montagnards have been forced to join the state-sponsored Protestant Church. In December 2005, armed troops were deployed in at least 56 villages in Gia Lai, Dak Lak and Dak Nong provinces to intimidate the Montagnards and maintain surveillance over them at Christmas. Since 2001, some 300 Montagnards have been arbitrarily detained.

Vietnam’s “improved” religion legislation was supposed to ease religious activity and clarify how non-registered religious organizations could acquire legal status. Sources inside Vietnam report that some registration of religious activity for local congregations of both registered and non-registered religious groups has occurred. The most marked progress has been in the Central Highlands province of Gia Lai where 29 of some 450

congregations of the recognized Evangelical Church of Vietnam (South) have been registered and where the first permanent church building built in the Central Highlands in 31 years was dedicated on February 2, 2006. However, our sources also report that in neighboring Dak Lak province only four congregations of an even larger Christian population have been registered and there is no sign of change. Not one of Vietnam's estimated 50 house church organizations has received national registration; reportedly, the vast majority are not even willing to risk trying.

The most egregious situation remains among the estimated 250 to 300 thousand ethnic minority Christians, mainly Hmong, in the Northwest provinces. Our sources report that government documents dated in 2005 and 2006 indicate that official anti-Christian campaigns are still in progress. The Protestant church and certain leaders are named as targets of the campaign in some of these documents. Ma Van Bay and other Hmong Protestant leaders remain in prison on false charges. Persecution drove Hmong Christians to flee to several neighboring countries in 2005. During a current government campaign to provide family registration papers and individual ID cards to citizens in the Northwest provinces, minority Christians are not allowed to enter "Christian" in the religion line on the application papers. Reportedly, if they do, they are denied the papers, in what appears to be a new manifestation of the authorities' campaign to get the ethnic minorities to recant their Christian faith. More than 1,100 ethnic minority Christian congregations have been accepted by the legally-recognized Evangelical Church of Vietnam (North) but remain completely illegal in the eyes of the government. Their leaders are told Vietnam has freedom of religion but it is not for them.